

1 July 2009

By: Tudor Vieru, Science Editor



US teens are the largest smoking segment of the population, yet they exhibit the lowest quitting rate  
Flickr / b0r0da

## [Teens Need Evidence-Based, Online Smoke-Prevention Programs](#)

*They don't know where to look for help when they want to quit*

Statistically speaking, the largest part of the smoking population in the United States is below the age of 25, and most of these kids, oddly enough, want to quit, at some point or another. However, when it comes down to it, they are looking for evidence-based programs, and seem to favor those that can be attended online, rather than in a support group. Now, the National Cancer Institute is awarding the University of Illinois in Chicago (UIC) a \$2.9-million project, to lead the development of such teen-oriented approaches, and assess their effectiveness as well.

"Even though many young adults think about quitting and actually want to stop smoking, they tend not to use what we know works - evidence-based approaches to quitting," the UIC Institute for Health Research and Policy Director, Psychology Professor Robin Mermelstein explains. He is also the principal investigator for the new, five-year study.

The expert also says that, in spite of the fact that teens are the largest smoking segment of the population, they exhibit the lowest quitting rate, which is a really concerning fact. Over the past few years, the United States have actively engaged in curbing the number of kids who smoke, and even passed a bill giving the FDA control powers over the tobacco industry.

"Our prior research has shown that if you want to reach and engage young adults, then you need to go where they are, and the Internet is it. Our approach is to develop messages that might have enduring value and deliver these messages across the Internet to drive the demand of young adults to seek evidence-based treatments," Mermelstein continues.

"Ultimately, we want to help young smokers to quit smoking now before they continue to accrue the health risks associated with smoking," the professor adds. Together with UIC, part of the new investigation are the University of Iowa and the American Legacy Foundation as well. These institutions will work together with the GDS&M Idea City advertising agency, to elaborate interactive and attractive ads and encourage teens to seek help.

According to Mermelstein, most young adults have terrible misconceptions about the treatment involved with quitting the habit, and also about its availability and accessibility. "They often express skepticism about treatments, or think they are better off using alternative approaches, and tend to dismiss what we know works. We need to demystify those beliefs about treatment; that treatment is not bad, that it's often the surest way to quit," the expert concludes by saying.